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Participation of Women in Panchayati Raj System in Uttarakhand : The Issue of Women Empowerment

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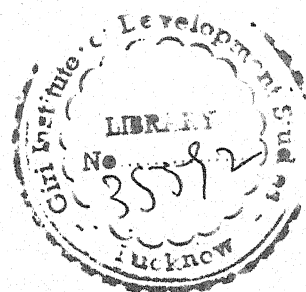
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PARTICIPATION OF WOMEN IN PANCHAYATI
RAJ SYSTEM IN UTTARAKHAND: THE ISSUE
OF WOMEN EMPOWERMENT

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Women - Social
Role and Status

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PREFACE

In order to improve the socio-economic condition of women various initiatives have been taken in India during the past. The recent policy level state intervention under the 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act of Panchayati Raj System has reserved one third seats in different tiers of Panchayats for women with the intention of increasing their participation in various decision making process and administrative activities at panchayat level so as to strengthen their empowerment.

The present study, undertaken in block Kapkote of district Almora, U.P. is an attempt to examine the various issues related to the implementation process of reservation policy and the pattern of participation of elected women Pradhans and women members of village Panchayats in various development activities, meetings, decision making processes and the activities of Block Panchayat and village Panchayats. Beside this, it also examines the extent of improvement that have been realised by women Pradhans and women members in their socio-economic and political status after being elected the representatives of village Panchayats.

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G.S. MEHTA

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PART I

INTRODUCTION : PLANNING EFFORTS AND EMERGING ISSUES ON EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN

1.0 GENERAL

In India women have been deprived from availing various kinds of opportunities and advantages by our traditional society for the past several centuries. Disadvantages against women are commonly practiced in the opportunities of socio-economic development, participation in different activities, availing educational facilities and various other development programmes associated with improving the life style and the quality of life, because of several social and cultural backwardness. Besides this, women are also denied the rights in the decision making process in their family affairs on account of social and cultural constraints imposed by their family and the continuation of traditional system

of civilisation. Restrictions are also imposed in the participation of women in certain social and cultural programmes and to move outside households for certain purposes. Due to these underlined problems imposed by our traditional society against women their participation in different activities, education, employment, political systems etc. has been very poor even after fifty years of independence. The condition of women in rural areas is far behind and more dissatisfactory than in urban areas on account of greater backwardness and the prevalence of traditional social and cultural system of society. The traditional form of society is keeping open different types of opportunities for their male family members only while the women are marginalised. In fact the women are seriously exploited by men for certain purposes although most household related activities are performed by women in the rural area.

Similar disadvantage in employment and other activities linked with betterment of life is commonly observed in the case of women on account of the socio-cultural constraints imposed by households and discrimination practised by the employers. At the same time, restriction imposed against women in utilising own rights independently

and social compulsion to make movements only for certain distances impose limitations in the availing opportunity of gainful employment of women. In addition to this, the discrimination against women in employment is largely a result of social values which tend to place women in a secondary position and under subjugation of men. Also, inspite of having similar level of educational attainment and productive efficiency for performing any economic activity or needed for any occupation the employer practisise a discriminatory behaviour against women.

1.1 PAST EFFORTS FOR DEVELOPMENT AND EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN

After independence, provisions were made in the Indian constitution to provide equal rights and opportunities of socio-economic development and betterment of living for men and women, including different disadvantaged segment of population to establish an egalitarian and prosperous society. In view of bringing improvements in the socio-economic condition of women efforts were made to maximise the participation of women in different educational levels, with the notion that education is the most important instrument to bring awareness about their rights, social status, as a prime

element to maximise participation in different categories of remunerative employment etc. This goal of increasing participation in education was sought to be achieved by planning for introducing subsidised educational facilities, expansion of girls educational institutions on a priority basis, developing educational curriculum according to the need and requirements of girls, recruitment of women teachers and providing various other facilities. In addition to this, various development programmes were also introduced, specially for women, in the various plans during the past with the intention that the participation of women in different development programmes could be increased at certain extent.

The Directive Principle of State Policy enshrined in the constitution have a special bearing on the status and empowerment of women. The constitution guarantees political equality to women through the institution of adult franchise. This recognition was certainly a radical departure from socio-cultural norms of the traditional Indian society. In the past various legal reforms were, therefore, initiated to improve the status of women in the typical Indian social system and to strengthen the women's empowerment. Important reforms in this direction were Hindu

Marriage Act, Hindu Succession Act, Hindu Adoption and Maintenance Act, Hindu Minority and Guardianship Act, Dowry Prohibition Act, Maternity Benefit Act etc.

During the women decades the women were promised that various development schemes and reforms would be introduced at the policy level to provide more respectable status to women in Indian society. Most important laws and reforms enacted to further strengthen the legal status of women were Equal Remuneration Act, Marriage Law Amendment Act, The Child Marriage Restrain (Amendment Act), Amendments to the criminal law which made crime against women a punishable offence.

Initiatives were also carried out in different Fifth Five Year Plans to maximise the participation of women in different development programmes. For the first time a chapter on "Women and Development" was included in the Sixth Five Year Plan, introducing women specific and related programmes which can bring improvement in the socio-economic condition of women. Further the Eight Fifth Five Year Plan introduced a variety of development programmes specifically for women. Under the National Perspective Plan for women provision was made to maximise the participation of women in on

going IRDP and other programmes introduced at providing self employment opportunities. During this plan, an Indira Mahila Yojana was introduced, and a Rastriya Mahila Kosh established to encourage women to hold their own saving's accounts and funds for productive activities.

1.2 OUTCOME OF THE PAST EFFORTS

The outcome fo these measures undertaken in different plans for the upliftment of women's status and socio-economic condition, have certainly attracted to women to associate and participate in different development programmes. However, lack of awareness among a large segment of rural women living in backward and remote areas under the subjugation of men, social and cultural boundations restricting them to remain within the household etc. has limited the actual participation of women to a lower level. Consequently the eligible beneficiaries and helpless women who need help remained uncovered under the past development programmes.

Keeping in view the performance and achievement level of the past planning strategies and policies initiated for improving the status and empowering women the debates had been widely spread

out among the policy makers and social reformers about how women could be empowered in the presently existing social backwardness and traditional restrictions imposed in rural hierarchical system against women. It was, therefore, emphasised that the solution for empowering women could rest on the situation of their political partnership. Political partnership can be considered to include an involvement in any form of organised activity that seeks to influence the attitudes and behaviour of those who have power of decision making. But it is also universally believed, considering the past experiences, that the efforts undertaken for empowerment of women suffered due to nexus of traditional factors of castes, class, religion, feudal and family status which are essentially patriarchal forces that work in favour of men against women. Even in voting for any election the rights of women for voting are restricted resulting that their turnout is much less than men due to pressure from family and society. Equally important factor in this regard is lack of awareness among women regarding the importance and rights of their casting votes.

1.3 WOMEN IN PANCHAYATI RAJ SYSTEM: ISSUE OF WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT

With the objective of maximising the participation of women in public mainstream, political system and decision making process is seen clearly in the changes incorporated in the Panchayati Raj System. The objective of bringing improvement in the socio-economic condition of women could be successful only by taking suitable initiatives and measures for empowering them. Women can not be empowered unless they are provided proper representation in the political system. This objective is understood to be achieved at desired level through making the provision of linking and associating maximum number of women in political affairs even at the lowest level of political activity.

In the recently introduced Panchayati Raj System, the policy for reservation in favour of women has, therefore, been thought as an important approach to maximise their participation in the local level political system and decision making process in the activities of rural areas. Under the 73rd amendment of constitution of Panchayati Raj System, one third of the total seats of members and heads of village Panchayat, Block Panchayat and District Panchayat are reserved for women candidates.

Conceptually, providing representation to women in Panchayati Raj System could be accepted as an important planning approach regarding minimising the traditional feelings of people about the status of women in our society, particularly in terms of keeping women under the subjugation of men, imposing restrictions by the households and society against them in the availment of certain opportunities and several other social, cultural and traditional boundations disfavouring them for improving personel life style and status in existing social and economic setting. Consequently this newly introduced policy would enhance the possibilities of increasing equalities in the process of socio-economic development, participation in different activities and development programmes, bringing closeness in mutual understandings, status and role to pay in the household and the activities performed outside households and different decision making processes of the family among men and women. This would also develop the understanding of women regarding their duties and rights about national welfare and its integrity and they will be able to contribute effectively along with their male counterparts.

However, the achievement level of these intervention undertaken by the Government to safeguard the interest and provide empowerment to women would more especially depend upon its implementation process and flexibility maintained in its implementation criteria based on regional/area specific social and cultural elements and conditions, level of awareness of the realities and objectives of the policy to different socio-economic groups of women. Beside this, the factors such as educational level, local environmental situation, attitude of family particularly its male members, past background of women related to the pattern of their participation in different social, political and related activities, category and groups of women elected as the representatives of Panchayats at its different tiers, socio-economic status and background and several other factors are equally important elements of achieving the level of success of the introduced policy intervention.

1.4 THE PRESENT STUDY

The present study was undertaken in district Almora of Uttarakhand, U.P. The Uttarakhand comprising twelve districts is universally categorised among the most backward region, both

socially and economically, in India. However, it is believed that with the introduction of Panchayati Raj System in general and the implementation of reservation policy in different tiers of Panchayats with the intention of giving empowerment to women and to improve their socio-economic status in particular could be an important policy measure in increasing the process of economic development of the region along with bringing improvements in the status of women in the society. The economy of Uttarakhand is mainly based on women because a significant increasing tendency of outmigration prevailing among the male members of the family. Also, women have been actively participating in different social and political movements organised in the past. But, even after the domination of women in population, workforce, social and cultural activities, household affairs, the traditional social system prevailing for the past several generations is restricting a majority of women to participate in decision making process of the household.

1.5 THE OBJECTIVES

Recognising the existing dominant features of women in the regional social and economic systems for past several centuries, the policy of providing reservation for women in the village Panchayat could be an effective instrumental measure for bringing empowerment among women in the region. In this context the present study has attempted to examine the various issues related to the participation of women in the capacity of the member and head of village Panchayat and Block Panchayat. More specifically the broad objectives of the study are as follows;

1. The socio-economic background and the personal characteristics of the women Panchayat member and the Pradhans.
2. The factors which motivated women to become the member or pradhan and the procedure adopted in the villages to identify the women candidates.
3. The outlook and plan of elected women members and pradhans towards the programme and planning to be adopted for the development of respective villages and the working pattern of village Panchayats headed by women.

4. The assessment of women's views and aspiraton regarding the use of their rights, duties, and work to be performed by them for protecting the interest of women and other disadvantaged groups of population.
5. The nature and magnitude of participation in the meetings at village and block level, role played in the decision making process in the meetings, outlook of male members of the panahayats and the family members in respect of their role, activities and routine work. Besides this the changes perceived by them in their social life and status in the society as well as at household level to be examined.
6. To make an assessment about the views of women regarding the success which can be achieved through the representation provided to them under Panchayat Raj System so as to granting them empowerment in the true sense.

1.6 METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY:

The study is based on personal discussions among the Pradhans and members of the village Panchayats. Although, the detailed study was carried out in the most backward block, Kapkote of

district Almora in Uttarakhand, but the general discussions on the implementation, the process and outcome of the policy were also held with the people outside the sample block.

The work of examining the issues related to the objectives of present study began with discussions with the last Village Pradhans and general people of different village Panchayats. Main points of discussions in this meeting were about the issues related to the awareness among general masses regarding the rights and duties of elected representatives and pradhans of the panahcyats, expectation of introducing Panchayat Raj systems in bringing changes in the prosperity and socio-economic development of the villages and its impact on the social and cultural setting of village environment, maintaining co-operation and traditional socio-cultural systems and several related aspects.

Later, meeting was held with the selected women Pradhans and women members of village Panchayats and Block Panchayat. Several issues related to the nature and magnitude of participation of women members and Pradhans in the meetings of Block Panchayat and Village Panchayats, role played in the last meetings, changes in the general activities and working efficiency in

matters and work related to the initiation, planning, implementation and management of development programmes of the Panchayats, outlook of Pradhans towards the co-operation and conduct among the elected members of Panchayats and villagers etc. were discussed with the male members of Panchayats headed by women Pradhans and the male Pradhans of other village Panchayats.

A detailed information related to the socio-economic background, personal characteristics, factors responsible for deciding to fight the election, participation in meetings, and other related issues of Pradhans and members of Panchayats was collected through personal discussion with them. Discussions were also held with the sample women Pradhans and the women members regarding the co-operation, outlook and role of male members in discussion on planning developments, decision making process for activities related to the initiation of any proposals for its financial grants, introduction of different schemes and development programmes, problems existing in proper utilisation of their rights and duties, changes experienced in the status at households and village level after becoming a part or head of the village panchayat.

1.7 THE SAMPLE:

There are 106 village Panchayats and one third of the seats are reserved for women, and thus 34 village panchayats are headed by the women Pradhans in the Kapkote block. The policy of reservation in each village Panchayat and Block Panchayat for women candidates is also well implemented. We selected twelve women pradhans and twenty women members of village Panchayats and five women members of Block Panchayats for the purpose of obtaining detailed information for our study. Considering the differences existing in the locations of different village Panchayats, in terms of their geographical and topographical conditions panchayats were selected accordingly from different types of locations such that each location may be covered in our study. Discussions were separately held with five men pradhans on several issues as indicated in the previous paragraphs.

The geographical area of the sample block is 604 sq. kms with the habitation of 214 villages. As per 1991 census, the population of the block is 70407; 34463 males and 35944 females. Thus the sample block constitutes 15.30 per cent share in area and around 9 per cent share in the population

of district Almora. Thus it is the largest block among all the fourteen blocks of the district both in terms of geographical area as well as in the size of population.

The sex ratio is 1043 females per thousand males, which is significantly higher than the average for Uttarakhand (955). However, the literacy rate accounts for 37.71 per cent; comprising 56.47 per cent for males and 19.71 per cent females. This is comparatively lower than the case of Uttarakhand as a whole which has a total literacy of 59.58 per cent; consisting 75.51 per cent among males and 42.87 per cent among females. The worker participation ratio is estimated to be as high as 46 per cent each for males and females while the corresponding figure for Uttarakhand accounts for 36 per cent consisting 46.69 per cent for men and 25.62 per cent for women.

PART II

IMPLEMENTATION OF RESERVATION POLICY AND POSSIBILITY OF EMPOWERING WOMEN

2.0 GENERAL INTRODUCTION:

It is believed that planning initiatives for achieving the goal of increasing participation of women through the recently introduced Panchayati Raj System could be an important instrument measure for empowering women and bringing desirable improvements in their socio-economic and political status. In this regard the policy of reservation of one third seats for women in village, block and district level panchayats was introduced. The provisions were also made to strengthen the Panchayati Raj Institutions by providing various administrative rights and duties, financial powers and the freedom to make initiatives for generating finances locally from different sources.

2.1 IMPLEMENTATION PROCESS:

The announcement of the implementation of Panchayati Raj System in Uttarakhand was carried out during November 1996. And, it took about two months in the identification and fixation of criteria for the reservation of seats for women in the three tier system of Panchayats and the finalisation of various formalities for the implementation of the Panchayati Raj System. The village development officer was designated as a responsible person for the fixation and identification of village Panchayats, implementation of criteria fixed for reserving certain village Panchayats for women Pradhan, number of seats to be reserved for women members in each village Panchayats etc. Thus the election of the Pradhans and members of village Panchayats were held by the end of December 1996.

Implementation of Panchayati Raj System in Uttarakhand started with the preparation of houselisting of every village. In most of the cases existing Gram Sabhas were converted into a village Panchayat. However, there were larger numbers of village Sabhas having small size of population and were earlier provided the status of

Gram Sabha due to the existing geographical and topographical problems in their locational settings, the village panchayats were formed by merging two or more such small village sabhas into single village Panchayat. In the initiation of such procedure the option was left open for the inhabitants of concerned villages to suggest and provide collective choice and preference about the merger of their villages. Beside this, the locational aspects related to the geographical and topographical situation of identified villages was also considered as an important element for the merger of villages in forming village panchayats.

For the purpose of the implementation of reservation policy for favour of women firstly, all the village panchayats were listed in alphabetical order and secondly, 34 village panchayats in that alphabetical order were made reserved for Women Pradhan in each Block Panchayat. Later the location-wise categorisation of households into 9 to 11 groups was undertaken in each village panchayats for the purpose of the fixation of the constituency of the members of panchayat. In each village panchayat 3 to 4 constituencies were, thus, kept reserved for women candidates.

When people at the village level were informed that the proposed village panchayats will be

provided larger financial resources and additional administrative powers the election took place in almost all the village panchayats for both village pradhans as well as its members. With the nomination of a larger numbers of candidates from each social groups an entirely new political environment was created in the villages before the final election were held. This emerging political environment has given birth to groupism, social clashes and conflicts. As a consequence traditionally maintained co-operation and friendly environment among different groups of population has begun to deteriorate. In fact, several groups emerged and the households were divided into various groups and division during the election period.

However, once the process of formation of Panchayats was completed the general public as well as the representatives of the village panchayats found that no new benefits are appearing in the introduction of this revised Panchayati Raj System. So the traditional system of co-operation and friendly environment have started re-developing in various villages. Only a major change was reported by the local people in terms of providing representation to women in the new form of Panchayats; though a significant number of male

population has shown dissatisfaction over the introduction of reservation policy in favour of women.

2.2 LOCAL PERCEPTIONS FOR EMPOWERING WOMEN:

(a) Status of Women : The women have been regarded as a backbone of the region in terms of the role they have been playing in the development and prosperity of the Uttarakhand for the past several generations. However, in most of the cases they lack equal treatment, behaviour and status as provided to their male counterparts. They have been participating in different activities at household and outside household level along with male members of the family. In fact certain activities are performed only by the women at household level.

(b) Participatory Role: Moreover, the domination of women in population, workforce, local environment and economic development process is quite evident in almost the entire mountain areas of the region. The close association of women, directly or indirectly, with different activities at household, social, cultural, community and regional levels has been a long history in the

tradition of area specific socio-cultural system. This deep rooted association and linkages of women with local social and cultural environment had been a channel of encouragement for maintaining the traditional value system and ideology of the region. The system of co-operation and friendly atmosphere in the behavior of mountain people prevailing has been maintained without any hesitation and without any basic shortcoming for the past several generations. Even in currently increasing situation of socio-economic conflicts among local masses influenced by the forces outside Uttarakhand, is also only a short term phenomenon and the women folk are engrossed in a battle against this evil and should be able to overcome the situation without much problem.

In most areas of Uttarakhand the women are well aware about their basic responsibilities, duties and the way they can devote their energies in the interest and welfare of the region. In this context the mass participation of women in various social movements organised for imposition of ban on the opening of wine shops in the region, environmental and economic movements, widely known as Chipko movement against increasing deforestation and degradation of mountain environment, and on going political movement in

favour of creation of separate Uttarakhand state are some examples which prove the awareness among women.

The reasons and factors associated with motivating active participation of women in different socio-economic and political movements in the past have been the rise of those activities which have gone against the interest of women largely. They have felt that the increasing rise and development of such activities which were carried out under protection of local unsocial elements for their self interest and the inability of Government to intervene and impose ban on those activities would ultimately create problems in the peaceful socio-economic and environmental setting of the region; also they would be the main sufferers if development of such undesirable activities is carried out. For instance the cause of mass participation of women in Chipko movement has been the result of excessive and increasing deforestation by the forest mafias and contractors belonging both to Uttarakhand and outside Uttarakhand, mismanagement of forest department, lack of intervention on the part of Government to impose ban on over exploitation of various forest products. The influential local men and contractors have also started participating with

the forest mafias in deforestation merely for obtaining short term financial gains. In the mean time, women had realised that the increasing deforestation would create serious problem for them in obtaining fodder for animals, fuel-wood for cooking and heating, timber for house construction and different forest products for various purposes. The ultimate sufferer of deforestation would be women because the collection of forest products is the responsibility and prime duty of women. As a result women have established various women societies and organisations to fight against deforestation and they have succeeded to a considerable extent in their efforts.

Similarly, lack of introducing developing planning according to the acceptability of local geographical, topographical and related local conditions and thus marginalisation of the region in planning for development resulting in increasing un-employment, increasing dependency of Government upon the natural resources of the region for satisfying the demands of outside region without providing any incentive and development gains to the local areas in exchange of exploiting area specific local resources have motivated the women volunteers to organise collectively for demanding separate statehood of Uttarakhand.

Agitation of women for imposition of ban on the supply of wine and other alcoholic products is another most popular movement initiated in almost all mountain areas of the region during eighties. This movement had been successful in achieving its goal in 1977 when the Government had restricted the use and supply of wine and related items in the region, though local mafias and businessmen had started supplying alcoholic products in the name of ayurvedic medicines. This issue was brought into notice of judiciary by the women organisations and a ban was imposed on the sale of these alcoholic products. Again the women's movement received mass co-operation and assistance from students, N.G.O.'s and various social workers in 1991-92 when the Government had permitted the wine contractors to open wine shops even at tehsil level and in small towns. The movement of women against opening wine shops on mass scale is an ongoing process with the slogan of 'Nasha Nahi Rajagar Doe' : In this regard the women volunteers are well supported and influenced by the national level women's organisations to carry out agitations with maximising the participation of women. Recently in February, 1997, a national seminar was also organised in Pithoragarh in this regard by the women's organisations which was attended by various

local and national social workers, well known women representatives including Mrs. Mohini Giri, Radha Behen and Chhaya Kanwar etc. The participation of women has been very appreciable in the local level agitations and movements organised for bringing improvement and change in the socio-economic conditions of women and general development of the region in the past.

The most important factors behind the mass level participation of women in different movements could be the domination of women in different activities, maintaining traditional social systems and cultural values, more responsibilities as compared to men in performing household related activities, high incidence of male migration resulting in a majority of households being headed by women and relatively higher literacy rates of women in the region as compared to state and national level.

2.3 POSSIBILITY OF EMPOWERING WOMEN

Considering the involvement and domination of women in different activities, historical experiences regarding their participation in various regional movements associated to different motives, level and pattern of awareness about the

regional development and maintaining traditional value system and having relatively better educational attainment it is expected that the introduction of Panchayati Raj System and reservation policy for women in the Panchayat could be an important instrumental measure for achieving improvements in the socio-economic status and strengthening the empowerment of women in Uttarakhand. Moreover, the policy and planning for empowering women could be more successful in Uttarakhand as compared to other areas and states in view of the higher literacy, better awareness and active participation in the local level movements in the region.

However, the motive of policy introduction on empowering women would mainly depend upon its implementing process, socio-economic and political background and characteristics of elected women representatives in the village Panchayats. Factors such as the attitude and intention of elected women towards the initiation of various development programmes and the capacity in making efforts to link different segment of village population with the introduced programmes also matter very much in improving the status of women representatives in the social environment of the

village Panchayat. As a consequence this process would lead increasing improvement in strengthening empowerment of women.

2.4 IDENTIFICATION OF RESERVED VILLAGE PANCHAYATS

The procedure for identification and fixation of locations as reserved for women candidates adopted at village panchayat level have already been highlighted. However, the time devoted in identification of reserved village panchayats for women pradhans and reserved locations/constituencies for its women members was very short. Limited duration of two months between the announcement of election and the actual dates fixed for final election had limited the scope of a large number of women having relatively better socio-economic and political background, better educational level and social outlook as compared to most women elected as members and the pradhans in the various village panchayats. It would have been more appropriate to initiate the measures for providing knowledge and awareness among villagers in general and women in particular about the reservation of seats for different sex and social groups of population in different village panchayats so that most eligible women candidates

would have found the opportunity of contesting election for these positions.

A majority of the identified villages brought under the reservation for women pradhans had the representation of well educated women. Some of the women in few villages had even participated in social movements organised at regional level in the past. However, in certain villages the well educated women could not contest election either for the post of Pradhan or members of the village panchayats because of restrictions imposed by their heads of households due to higher work load, social backwardness, lack of awareness about the duties, benefits and role of elected women in the Panchayats, etc. Procedures adopted for the fixation of reservation of seats for women in the Panchayats and identification of village Panchayats as reserved for women candidates was not based on the local condition of geographical and topographical settings of villages but it was base on the same pattern or criteria as adopted in the plain areas of the state. Several village Panchayats which were identified for reservation of women Pradhan are located in remote, inaccessible and away from the nearest road heads and block headquarter. This has been creating a serious problem to women pradhan to participate in meetings

regularly which are organised outside their respective villages and at block office. On an average, reaching the block office from some of the respective village panchayats takes more than one day. Therefore, irregularity in most of the meetings organised at Block Panchayat and District Panchayat level was a common phenomenon.

In the process of identification of village panchayats for implementing reservation policy for women condidates the locational aspects of concerned villages in terms of topographical, goeographical and accessibility situation should have been given top priority. This was the beginning of implementing a new policy and introduction of any new policy basically requires maximum support and participation of local people. Care should also have been taken to include flexibility options based on locally acceptable conditions and prevailing situations for the successful implementation of the concerned programme. So, selection of village panchayats located in better accessible areas and neighbouring to block headquarter for reservation of women Pradhan would have been a important element in maximising the participation of women Pradhans in different meetings held outside their respective village Panchayats.

Similarly, the procedure adopted for the identification of reserved village Panchayats for women Pradhans and locations/areas within the village panchayats for women members should have provided greater opportunity to the well educated women and to those having higher contribution in the various regional movements and local level social reform activities as compared to the women who have actually availed the opportunity to find place in the village Panchayats and Pradhan and the members. Practically, it is rather difficult task for a less qualified women and new enterents in political system and who have never participated in any meetings and social activities to play an active and dominant role in the male dominated meetings for any decision making process. So, the identification of reserved village Panchayats and locations within village Panchayats for women Pradhans and women members respectively, should have been undertaken purposively by keeping in mind the availability of suitable women condidates in different village Panchayats. It has to be considered that the inclusion of well qualified women in village Panchayats at the initial stage of the introduction of Panchayati Raj System in rural areas would be a important instrumental measure in planning for improving social status and empowering

women. This group of women, if provided representation at village Panchayat level can strongly raise the issues related to the betterment of women, can play a dominant role in decision making process and make suitable recommendations for improving the status of women in the meetings.

PART III
PARTICIPATION OF WOMEN IN
PANCHAYATI RAJ SYSTEM

3..0 INTRODUCTION

In this chapter an attempt is being made to analyse the information collected from the sample of elected women Pradhans and members of the different village Panchayats on various issues such as their socio-economic and political background, personal characteristics, elements motivated them to associate with panchayats, pattern of participation in meetings and the extent of role being played in the decision making process of the village and Block Panchayats etc. Besides this an assessment is also undertaken to review the efforts of elected Pradhans in the initiation of development activities, their involvement and nature of participation in different development programmes and the performance of work initiated by them in the respective village Panchayats.

3.1 SOCIO-ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL BACKGROUND

The advantage of introducing reservation policy for women in Panchayati Raj system has gone mainly in favour of women belonging to socio-economically and politically sound background. Awareness and knowledge about the provision of providing reservation for women and criteria laid down for the identification of reserved village Panchayats for women Pradhans was available mainly to the those whose male family members were already associated in any political system and village sabhas in the past. As a result such category of people have started making efforts to make local conditions favourable for their women members considerably before the time of actual selections. However, the other groups of people, those who were lacking the association with any political system could get information about the introduction of reservation policy for women at much later stages when the other groups of people had fully developed the platform conducive for their women candidates. It was observed that a majority of the elected Women Pradhans in different village Panchayats were the relatives and family members of people who had represented Gram Sabhas in the past. However, second majority of the

elected women Pradhans were the family members of people engaged in business activity or working as contractor or employed as teacher in local educational institutions/schools. Most of the women Pradhans had strong economic background; though, agriculture was the main family occupation but the contribution of income generated through other than agricultural activities and occupations, to the total income of household was observed much higher than the income earned from agriculture.

3.2 PERSONEL CHARACTERISTICS

Enquiring about the personal characteristics of the elected village Pradhans we found that most of them were well educated but only two, out of the total sample of twelve women Pradhans had earlier participated in the strike and political movement at college level. A majority of seven Pradhans had availed secondary education followed by four Pradhans had middle level and only one had post-graduate level of education. One woman Pradhan having secondary level education had earlier been associated with Yuvak Mangal Dal and had the background of participation in local level movements. These women Pradhans were quite young and were concentrated in the age group of 25 years

to 35 years. The elected women members of various village Panchayat were also young. However, most of them had availed middle and primary level of education and three women members were illiterate.

3.3 FACTORS MOTIVATING WOMEN FOR CONTESTING ELECTIONS:

Almost all the women Pradhans of village Panchayats were motivated to contest election by their male family members and male relatives but only one of them had taken the initiative herself and then consulted the head of the household/husband in this regard. Three women had initially refused the advise and suggestion of their male family member for contesting the election of Pradhan by pointing out the various problems in contesting the election. However, they were assured of getting full co-operation and assistance in the routine work of the Panchayat and other difficult situations. They were also made aware about the benefits to be derived in terms of improving socio-economic status after becoming village Pradhan and ultimately they agreed to fight the election.

Before being elected as Pradhan, almost all of them were engaged in agricultural activities. However, only one woman Pradhan was living away from her village in a neighbouring town with her husband who was working as a contractor. The women Pradhans were accompanied by their male family members or husbands while making first visit to the block headquarter for the purpose of filling nomination papers for contesting the election. The women members of the different village Panchayats had also informed that they were influenced and motivated by the male family members for contesting the election for the respective positions. The male members of the family had been with them in approaching the block office for completing the basic formalities required for the eligibility of the candidates and the filing of nomination papers. It was reported by all sample women members of different village Panchayats that this was their first visit to the block otherwise they had never seen block office or any other government office in the past.

3.4 NATURE AND THE MAGNITUDE OF PARTICIPATION:

The Block Panchayat is the important and main forum for holding meetings of the members and Pradhans of village Panchayats, members and Block Pramukh of Block Panchayat. Issues related to the formulation, identification, introduction and planning of different development plans are generally discussed at Block Panchayat level. Discussions also take place in terms of experiences and problems faced by various Pradhans in the implementation of development programmes, besides the distribution of any new scheme and development activities among the village Panchayats. However, this is very surprising that only one meeting had been organised at Block Panchayat after the introduction of Panchayati Raj System. It was reported that the participation of women Pradhans and members was quite satisfactory in this meeting. However, most women Pradhans were accompanied by their male family members. With the objections raised by the Block Pramukh and other male Pradhans against the presence of family members of women pradhans they left from the meeting held at Block Panchayat.

The issues for discussion in the meeting were mainly raised by Block Pramukh and male Pradhans which were latter discussed and well participated by few women representatives of village Panchayats. However, a significant duration of time was devoted in the introduction of elected Pradhans and members representing different village Panchayats. Issues related to providing knowledge and information regarding the duties and rights emphasised in Panchayati Raj System, details of development programmes to be implemented in different village Panchayats, provision of budget for development projects and several other matters were put before the Block Pramukh by both male as well as female Pradhans. However, the participation in the discussions related to these issues was mainly dominated by male Pradhans while the female Pradhans were playing the supporting role only on limited numbers of issues.

The women Pradhans were also observed hardly organising any meetings at village Panchayat level. Most of the Pradhans had reported that they did not realised for holding meeting frequently, either of the members or the general public of the concerned village Panchayat. Only one meeting was organised in most of the village Panchayats after the

introduction of Panchayati Raj System. However, two women Pradhans had reported that they had called the meetings of members and general public in two occasions during the past.

In the meetings of the village Panchayats, the issues related to the identification of projects and activities to be covered under the Jawahar Rojgar Yojana had been the main agenda of discussion. Besides this, the official charge was transferred from the Pradhans of old Gram Sabha to the new Pradhans of village Panchayat. The gathering of general public and the attendance of members was reported to be quite satisfactory in the meeting of most of the village Panchayats. However, the women members of the village Panchayats had little participation in the several issues of discussions held in the meeting. In fact the domination of male members and the individuals who had been associated in the last Gram Sabhas in the capacity of Panch or Pradhans in the past was significantly much appreciable. Several women Pradhans had reported that the male members of the village Panchayats had negative attitude and non-cooperative behaviour in making and finalisation of development project proposals for carrying out in the village Panchayats. In fact, in three sample village Panchayats, the male individuals among the

general public had intentionally raised several objections and disfavoured the initiation of various important development programmes under the JRY scheme and other activities. The strong views expressed by the representatives of old Gram Sabhas, those were mainly the family members of present women Pradhans, in the meeting had made it possible to defeat the interest of individuals opposing the initiation of proposed programmes. The women members of the panchayat were unable to participate actively in discussions for the initiation of concerned programmes due to the fact that a majority of them had first chance of participation in such large male dominated gatherings:

3.5 PARTICIPATION IN DEVELOPMENT ACTIVITIES/PROGRAMMES:

It was observed that the sample village Panchayats had not initiated any development programmes so far excepting that all of them are engaged in the implementation of Jawahar Rozgar Yojana only. So far, each village Panchayats had received Rs.20,000 to Rs.25,000 under the Jawahar Yojana Scheme since the introduction of Panchayati Raj System. This amount is being utilised mainly in the construction of Kharancha, repair of water

tanks and the maintenance of the fixed assets of the Panchayats. The participation of women Pradhans in the implementation of JRY was found quite dissatisfactory in the sense that most activities undertaken under JRY schemes have been managing by the male family members or the husband of the women Pradhans. Several doubts were also raised in mind regarding who signs on the payments made to the beneficiaries of the concerned scheme. However enquiring from the beneficiaries of JRY schemes we found that the payments are made by the concerned male members who is engaged in supervising the programme. But the beneficiaries were unaware with the fact that who signs on the payments made to them. Among the sample women Pradhans, only two of them were found personally engaged in supervision and the implementation of JRY scheme. However, in the social and cultural programmes and functions organised by the people the presence of Panchayats people was well appreciated by general public. In such occasions the members and the Pradhans are specially invited by the individual or the groups of people who are organising concerned programme in different villages. However, not any women Pradhan had organised any social function and social activities in their concerned village Panchayat.

3.6 WORKING PATTERN:

We did not find any differences existing in the working pattern, maintaining routine work of Panchayat, organising meetings, initiation of development programmes, involving different socio-economic groups of people in development activities and programmes and the process of implementation of different development work between the village Panchayats headed by women and men Pradhans. However, in the women headed village Panchayats, the implementation process of development programme such as JRY schemes and related activities the women Pradhans were mostly assisted by their male family members due to one or another reason while any kind of work undertaken in the men headed village Panchayats is independently performed by the male Pradhan of the concerned village Panchayats. In several cases it was noted that the performing any development programme has been the collective responsibility of all working family members of the women Pradhans rather than the woman Pradhan alone or the village Panchayats. In general, the members of the village Panchayats, either headed by women or men Pradhans, are observed they had been mainly concerned and are consulted by Pradhans for approving the proposals

of different development activities which are to be forwarded to the Block Panchayat or the District Development Authority or any Government department for its final approval and requesting for financial assistance. However, the implementation part of different development activities and programmes in most village Panchayats is independently undertaken by the Pradhans with the assistance and association of his/her main followers and family members without the involvement and participation of the members of respective village Panchyats.

3.7 INVOLVEMENT IN DICISION MAKING PROCESS:

Inquiring from the general public and the members of the sample village Panchayats regarding the role that had been played by the present women Pradhans in the general functioning and proposing the development programmes to be undertaken in the near future in the last meeting held in different village Panchayats, it was revealed that the most of the proposals of different activities and programmes were mainly proposed by the male members of the Panchayats and the general public. The aspects related to the relevance behind proposing such selected activities to be undertaken at the

village Panchayat level were collectively discussed by Pradhans, both men and women members and the general public of different village Panchayats; but the domination in the discussions was always seen from the punchas (representatives) belonging to the last Gram Sabhas and those were mainly the male members of the women Pradhans and members of the present Panchayats. However, in three sample village Panchayats the women pradhans had been remarkably well dominating in the several issues raised for discussions and in the decision making processes regarding the identification and selection of different development work to be proposed for undertaking in the concerned village Panchayats. Lack of knowledge about the functioning procedures of meetings, prevailing traditional system which restrict women to speak freely before their elder male family members and relatives, lack of previous experience in attending male dominated such a large meetings and several related problems might be prohibiting the effective participation of women in several issues of discussions and the decision making processes at policy level of the village Panchayats.

3.8 OUTLOOK AND CO-OPERATION OF MALE MEMBERS:

The women Pradhans have reported that they generally find good co-operation in the functioning of routine work of the Panchayats. But the nature of providing co-operation of male members seems to be motivated by personal interest and benefit of concerned member rather than for the interest of general public. They desire personal involvement in the implementation of JRY type programmes so as to derive the financial benefits. The groups of village community who were previously against the election of present women Pradhan have been creating increasing objections and problems in passing the proposal of different schemes in the last meeting. However, three women Pradhans had reported that they realise full co-operation from different groups of people in all the matters associated with village Panchayat's activities because of their strong hold and good reputation in the respective villages.

However, the outlook of general public regarding the attitude and intention of women pradhans towards, making efforts for bringing development programmes for the welfare of local people, participation in different programmes/activities, etc. was quite dissatisfactory in half

of the sample village Panchayats. It was reported that the women Pradhans of these villages are mainly concerned with their household activities rather than to participate in the initiation and implementation of development programmes. In fact two of the women Pradhans had never bothered to participate in the JRY scheme which was being implemented by their male family members. Reports were also obtained from the beneficiaries of JRY that the women Pradhans of these villages were never seen by them at the places of JRY activities have been undertaken.

3.9 CHANGES IN SOCIO-ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL STATUS:

Four of the sample women Pradhans and almost all the members of different village Panchayats had informed that they do not find any changes and improvements in their social and personal life, association with any political system, status at household or any society level, routine of family work after electing as the pradhan or member of village Panchayats. They also do not feel any favourable changes in getting respect from the village people. However, all pradhans receive honorable treatment in the social functions, religious activities and local level function by

both male and female population of the respective village Panchayats. But, three women Pradhans had found the opportunity to become the member of different political parties, attending the local level meetings of political parties, NGO's, Yuvak Mangal Dal and different social organisations. As a result of having significantly good reputation in local areas before heading the concerned village Panchayats of these Pradhan have provided them an additional opportunity to mobilise the support of a larger segment of population for performing any desired social activity. Two of these women Pradhans had reported that they regularly keep contacts, and ask about any kind of difficulty, and assist the different groups of population in properly functioning of any domestic activity or in any matter with the expectation to maximise the support of local people. However, remaining seven women Pradhans had been availing the additional opportunity of only participating in social functions such as marriages, religious activities and other related social activities; otherwise they do not reported any improvements that have been occurred in their socio-economic conditions and attachment with any political system after electing as the Pradhan.

3.10 VIEWS ON EMPOWERING WOMEN:

Further, asking about the views of women Pradhans regarding their acceptations about the implications of introducing reservation policy under Panchayati Raj System on achieving the goal of empowering women a majority of women Pradhans had very optimistic views that concerned policy would not only provide opportunities of empowering women but several traditional social and culture systems prevailing disfavoring and against women for the past several generations could be removed satisfactorily in the future. It was expressed that this is very early to discuss about concerned issues because the implications of this policy measures can not be realised after this short duration of about 6 months of the introduction of Panchayati Raj system in the sample areas. In fact, the women pradhans were not full aware about the provisions of rights, duties and methodology of functioning of village Panchayats introduced in the constitutional amendment of Panchayati Raj Act.

Moreover, only a single meeting has been organised at Block Panchayat level since the implementation of Panchayati Raj System. It was unfortunate for many of the women Pradhans that previously they had never participated in such

meetings. Therefore only limited numbers of women Pradhans were observed participating in different issues of discussions and at the final stages of policy decision making processes. It was believed that with the increasing participation of women representatives in such meetings to be organised at village Panchayat and block panchayat level would definitely enhance the increasing confidence among women to participate actively in the discussions, particularly in the issues of policy decision making process and present their views before the meetings for discussions.

In this regard the women Pradhans had recommended and suggested that frequently organising meetings independently for women representatives of different village Panchayats could be a instrumental measure so that the domination of women in various issues of discussions and presenting their views could be increased. This measure could develop the women's capacity, creativity and self confidence of exposing themselves in terms of presentation of views before the larger common meetings of women and men. The existing women Pradhans which have developed self confidence and acquired skill and art of participating in discussions sufficiently as a result of the past experiences and knowledge gained

from attending several social and political meetings can play a significant role in this regard. This process will not only increase the participation of women representatives of village Panchayats in various issues of discussions and policy finalisation but it will also be an important measure for improving social status and empowering them in the future.

PART IV

CONCLUSIONS

Since independence various initiatives have been undertaken for improving the socio-economic conditions and empowering women in India. In this context, the constitution of India in its Directive Principle of State Policy has made special provisions. The constitution guarantees socio-economic, cultural and political equalities and provision of providing equal rights in availing different opportunities to all social groups of population including men and women. Several development programmes and schemes have also been introduced specially for developing the socio-economic status of women during the past plans. At policy level, various legal reforms and resolution in the form of Acts have been introduced to improve the status of women in the Indian social system and to strengthen the women's empowerment.

In the recently introduced 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act of Panchayati Raj System a

reservation policy of one third of seats for heads and members of three tier level Panchayats have been introduced so as to maximise the participation of women in political, administrative decision making process and different development programmes at local level administration in rural society.

The present study, undertaken in Kapkote block of district Almora in Uttar Pradesh, is based on a sample of 12 women Pradhans, and 20 women members of village Panchayat selected from different geographical locations of the region. It attempted to examine several issues related to the implementation process of Panchayati Raj System and reservation policy introduced for women, participation of women in different activities, programmes, meetings organised at Block and Village Panchayat level and decision making process of Panchayats and the ultimate impact of Women's participation in Panchayati Raj System in strengthening their socio-economic status.

It was the general understanding among local people that the provision of reservation policy as introduced for women in Panchayati Raj Act for maximising their participation in the activities of village Panchayats would certainly bring changes to

the desired level in improving socio-economic conditions and empowering women in Uttarakhand. Because, the participation of women in various social, economic, political, cultural and local activities had been quite appreciable since a long period in different areas of the region. In fact, it has been well recognised that a high proportion of women had and have been actively associated in different political economic and social movements which were organised in the region during the past. In addition to this, due to larger volume of outmigration of male family members the women have been successfully devoting their time in performing and managing their household activities, participating in various social and community activities within and outside respective village. In all, the domination of women in different activities at local level has a long history in the region.

The geographical area of the sample block is 604 sq. kms and it is divided into 106 village panchayats. The policy of reservation for women, both for Pradhan as well as members of village Panchayats was fully implemented. In the block, 34 village Panchayats were headed by women as Pradhan and in each village Panchayats one third of

members were women. The identification of village Panchayats for reservation of women Pradhan was undertaken by listing of all 106 villages according to the alphabetical order. Then each village Panchayats was divided between 9 to 11 locations, depending upon the size of village population, and then one third of the locations were reserved for women members. However, very short duration of two months was provided in the implementation of Panchayati Raj System, identification and fixation of reserved village Panchayats for women Pradhans and constituencies for women members in each village Panchayat, conducting elections etc. The most crucial and important issues such as the accessibility, geographical, topographical conditions and several local specificities and problems have not been provided due consideration in merging different villages into a village Panchayat and the identification of village Panchayats as reserved for women candidates.

Once political activities gained momentum for election of Pradhans and members of Panchayats at village level, the village population was divided into various groups, based on caste, religion and location. This had increasingly contributed to the serious problem of conflicts and clashes among

various newly formed groups. As a consequence, traditionally well maintained socio-cultural system, mutual understanding and co-operation among different castes and social groups of population had mitigated at larger extent in several villages.

Women with socio-economically and politically sound background had mainly received the advantages of reservation policy which was introduced for women in Panchayati Raj System. Most elected women Pradhans in various village Panchayats were the relatives and family members of last Pradhans and had economically sound position. Agriculture was the main family occupation of all women Pradhans but the income earned from other occupations and activities such as contractors, remittances from migrant family members and business had a higher contribution in the income of the family as compared to agriculture.

The elected women Pradhans were well educated but only two, out of twelve sample women Pradhans had the past experience of active participation in political activities. Significantly a larger number of seven women Pradhans had secondary level education followed by four Pradhans who had middle level education and only one was graduate. Both women Pradhans as well as women members of sample village Panchayats were in the age groups of 25 to

35 years. And a majority of women members had availed middle and primary level education while three members were illiterate.

All the women Pradhans, excepting one, were motivated by their male family members for contesting the election of Pradhan. However, only one woman Pradhan who had been associated in different local level movements and social reform activities for a considerable duration had made up her mind to contest the election of Pradhan without the advice of her male family members. So, only she had requested her family members for their final advice and co-operation in this regard. Before, getting elected as Pradhan, almost all of them were engaged in agricultural activities, excepting one women Pradhan who was living with here husband in a nearby town.

Both, the women Pradhans as well as women members of all village Panchayats had always been accompanied by their male family members in visiting the offices of different Government Departments, District Panchayat and Block Panchayat. In fact, the male family members of women Pradhans had accompanied them and played a leading role in approaching Block Panchayat for

filling nomination papers and furnishing the basic formalities required for contesting election for Pradhan and members of the village Panchayats.

The participation of both women Pradhans as well as women members of village Panchayats had been quite satisfactory as far as attending the meetings of Block Panchayat. However, they had always been accompanied by their male family members in attending meetings at block Panchayat level because most of them have to cover long distances in reaching block office. Added to this is the orthodox cultural background which prohibits women from making a long journey independently.

Most women representatives of village Panchayats had been attending meetings of block Panchayat level merely to complete the formality of their presence. Otherwise, the participation of women in various issues of discussions raised in the meetings and several decision making processes had been rather unsatisfactory, which has resulted in the domination of male representatives of village Panchayats in the activities of block level meetings.

Further the performance of women Pradhans had been found very unsatisfactory in organising

meetings at village Panchayat level and initiating any development programme. Most of the women Pradhans, excepting two, had organised only one meeting since the implementation of Panchayati Raj System. Domination of male members of present village Panchayats and the people those represented last Gram Sabhas was commonly practised in the last meeting of various village Panchayats. However, two of the sample women Pradhans had organised two and three meetings respectively which were well attended by both men as well as women members and general public of concerned village Panchayats. Both these women Pradhans had the advantage of a good reputation which they have gained even before being elected as Pradhan as a result of their involvement in various local level social reform activities and active participation in social movements. They also have been dominating in the whole affairs and proceeding of the meetings in their respective village Panchayats. So far the women Pradhans had not initiated any development programme in their respective village Panchayats excepting that of Jawahar Rojgar Yojana which is a continuing programme since last several years. The grant which is received under JRY programme has been mainly utilised in the construction of Kharancja, repair of water tanks

and the maintenance of the fixed assets of village Panchayats. The participation of women Pradhans in the implementation of JRY scheme was also found very unsatisfactory. Because, in most Panchayats the JRY scheme was being implemented and supervised by male members belonging family of the women Pradhans. Some of the beneficiaries working with JRY projects have never seen either any women member or the women Pradhan at the site of JRY projects. There were doubts in the minds of beneficiaries about who really signs on the bills of payments made to them. However, two of the women Pradhans were found personally engaged in the supervision and implementation of JRY scheme in their concerned village Panchayats. So the quality of work done in the construction of Kharancja and repairs of water tanks in latter two village Panchayats was noted much superior than in the remaining village Panchayats where the scheme is implemented by male family members related to the women Pradhans.

Hardly any difference was observed in the working pattern, conducting routine work of Panchayats, performance of the implementation of JRY scheme, introduction of new development programmes outlook and future plan of action for

undertaking any welfare activity and development programmes etc, between the village Panchayats headed by women and men Pradhans. In both the category of village Panchayats the Pradhans had been consulting with the members only for preparing the development projects and forwarding them to different Government departments for financial grant.

However, in the meetings of village Panchayats, the issues related to the activities to be undertaken in village Panchayats in the future were mainly raised by male Panchayat members but the domination in the finalisation of project proposals was significantly much higher from male members representing the general public and family members of women Pradhans. The male members of village Panchayats were found providing co-operation to women Pradhans mainly in activities and matters which are to their benefits. They get involved in the implementation of JRY programme so as to obtain economic benefits.

The outlook of general public of different village Panchayats regarding the nature of outlook and involvement of women pradhans and women members in the promotion of welfare and social activities and initiation of development programmes was quite

dissatisfactory in more than half of the village Panchayats. Instead, women Pradhans were mainly concerned and engaged in their household's activities so that they can hardly spare any time which may be devoted in the interest and welfare of people of concerned village Panchayats.

Almost all the women Pradhans have not realised any improvements and favourable changes in their socio-economic and political status and in overall life style after being elected as a Pradhan. However, only three women Pradhans had achieved the opportunity of associating themselves with different political parties, Yuvak Mangal Dal and local level social organisations. Since two Pradhans were already involved in carrying out various social reform activities, becoming a Pradhan has provided them additional opportunities and widened the scope of their participation in various local level development programmes and socio-cultural activities at increasing level. However the participation of both women Pradhans as well as women members had significantly increased in social ceremonies, religious functions and marriages in respective village Panchayats.

The objective of introducing reservation policy for women in Panchayati Raj System with the prime motive of bringing improvements in socio-

economic conditions and empowering women could have been a successful measure of state intervention in Uttarakhand, if the identification of village Panchayats for the reservation of women Pradhans and locations/constituencies within the village Panchayats for women members should have been done considering into account the local conditions in terms of area specific geographical, topographical and accessibility situations. Beside this, villages having the availability of well educated women and having past experience of active participation in different social, economic and political movements should have been purposely selected as reserved village Panchayats for women Pradhans. Providing opportunities to such category of women in heading the village Panchayats at the initial stage of the introduction of Panchayati Raj System could have been instrumental in planning for improving socio-economic status and empowering women. This is so because they can strongly raise the issues related to the betterment of women and can play a dominant role in decision making process and make suitable recommendations for the inclusion of such development programmes which can favourably improve the status of women.

